

TEMPO VARIATION IN THE INTERPRETATION OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY'S *PRÉLUDE À
L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE*

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Tempo Variation in the Interpretation of Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

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INTRODUCTION

Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is one of the most important pieces in all of music history, and was heralded by Pierre Boulez (a leading musician of the twentieth century) as the beginning of modern music.¹ Since its premiere in 1894, Debussy's symphonic poems has been performed frequently in concert halls and recorded by some of the world's most influential orchestras and conductors. A piece of such importance invites numerous, and quite varied, interpretations, specifically regarding tempo; *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is 110 measures in length, yet contains twelve tempo markings and four printed tempo alterations (*ritardandi*). Of the numerous recordings that exist of the *Prélude*, running times vary from as short as eight and a half minutes to as long as almost twelve minutes. These vast differences in performance length are related, in part, to the fact that none of the printed tempo markings and alterations provide any specific metronome markings; in contrast, Debussy's *Jeux* contains almost sixty tempo markings, as frequent as a new tempo marking every two measures, and a fairly standard running time of eighteen minutes.² Additionally, because the source material of the *Prélude* is the symbolist poem *L'après-midi d'un faune* by Stéphane Mallarmé, interpretations could be influenced by the symbolist's vague and illustrative writing style.³ The varied differences in tempo interpretation is a reflection of the source material's poetic language.

¹ Pierre Boulez, "Entries for a Musical Encyclopaedia: Claude Debussy," *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 259-277.

² Laurence D. Berman, "'Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun' and 'Jeux': Debussy's Summer Rites," *19th-Century Music* 3, no. 3 (Mar. 1980): 226.

³ Thomas Munro, "'The Afternoon of a Faun' and the Interrelation of the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 10, no. 2 (Dec. 1951): 96.

Mallarmé, one of the most influential French symbolist poets of the late nineteenth century, believed in the interrelation of the arts – that is, the correspondence between poetry, music, visual art, and dance. Furthermore, these poets considered the relationship between the arts to be a reflection of the relationship of the human senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. With these beliefs, French symbolist poets considered their poetry, and the other forms of art inspired by their poetry, to suggest emotions and moods rather than concrete ideas. Mallarmé stated that poetry should “evoke in a deliberate shadow the unmentioned object by illusive words.”⁴ Mallarmé’s vague writing style is represented in Debussy’s *Prélude* musically through obscurity (of phrase, harmony, etc.) just as his own words evoked unclear images.

Mallarmé considered music to be a unifying art and compared his language of poetry to musically writing for voice. Mallarmé thought of poetry as an expression of one character simultaneously living in two worlds – the physical world and the spiritual world. To achieve poetic duality, Mallarmé paid particular attention to the use of open and nasal vowels at the conclusion of each poetic line, creating an unresolved atmosphere (Example 1). Additionally, Mallarmé used silence in his poetry to allow the character to exist in the physical world while pondering the spiritual world. Mallarmé’s poetic silences, as in music, are lyrical and can be used to deconstruct form, allowing for poetic daydreaming.⁵ This daydreaming in Debussy’s *Prélude* is established at the onset with the flute’s improvisatory sounding, chromatic solo which contains all of the melodic intervals used for the entirety of the piece (Example 2).⁶

Example 1: Mallarmé, *L’Après-midi d’un faune*

⁴ Munro, “Interrelation of the Arts,” 96.

⁵ Jeannette Leigh Callet, “The Performative Voice in Mallarmé’s Poetic Reverie,” *French Forum* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 48-49.

⁶ Edward Pearsall and John Wm. Shaffer, “Shape/Interval Contours and Their Ordered Transformations: A Motivic Approach to Twentieth-Century Music Analysis and Aural Skills,” *College Music Symposium* 45 (2005): 72-73.

Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer.
 Si clair,
 Leur incarnate léger, qu'il voltage dans l'air
 Assoupi de someils touffus.

Example 2: Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, mm. 1-4.



Perhaps a hint at the reason for vast interpretations of tempo in the *Prélude* stems from the poetic line structure of symbolist poets. Unlike the poetry of William Shakespeare, with its regular structure of form and line composition, Mallarmé, and other symbolist poets, do not write with a regular metric structure. Shakespeare commonly wrote poetic lines in formal metric structures, notably iambic pentameter consisting of five metric feet of unstressed followed by stressed syllables (Example 3); Mallarmé's poetic lines cannot be analyzed with metric feet, as one line may contain twelve syllables with no clear order of stressed and unstressed syllables, and the next line may only contain four syllables (Example 4). To further obfuscate poetic structure, Mallarmé's text alternates between regular roman type and italics, a convention unheard of in standard literary circles, further suggesting the faun's daydreaming.⁷ Debussy reflects the vague atmosphere of Mallarmé's poem through music with no clear formal structure. To further reflect Mallarmé's language, conductors have interpreted Debussy's *Prélude* with vast differences in tempo, a clear representation of Mallarmé's unconventional writing style.

Example 3: Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

⁷ Munro, "Interrelation of the Arts," 97-98.

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Example 4: Mallarmé, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*

Tacites sous les fleurs d'étincelles, CONTEZ
'que je coupais ici les creux roseaux domptés
Par le talent;...
'Et qu'au prélude lent où naissent les pipeaux

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune contains twelve written tempo markings, with none providing a specific metronome marking. The twelve tempo markings (translated into English) are: 1) very moderate, 2) with animation, 3) always with animation, 4) Tempo I, 5) the same tempo and very supported, 6) tempo of the beginning, 7) a little more animated, 8) Tempo I, 9) with more animated motion, 10) Tempo I with more languor, 11) a tempo, and 12) very slow and very ritardando until the end (Appendix 1). For the remainder of this project, tempo markings will be referred to by their chronological tempo order. Many tempo markings (tempi 2, 3, 7, 9, and 12) suggest a mood, while the other tempo markings only give reference to the first tempo; tempo 1 simply states “very moderate,” which according to many modern metronomes could range anywhere between 84-120 beats per minute. At the onset, Debussy is allowing conductors to make widely varying tempo decisions.

Numerous relationships exist between tempi which, theoretically, create some semblance of balance and symmetry throughout the work. According to Debussy's tempo markings, tempi 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11 should all be the same tempo. Additionally, tempi 2, 3, 7, and 9 all suggest a tempo that is “animated,” but does not specify if a precise 1:1 relationship exists between these tempo markings; furthermore, it is up to the conductor to determine how fast “animated” means and what relationship might exist between the piece's opening “very moderate” tempo and the following “animated” tempi. The following is an analysis of seven

recordings of the *Prélude* for their tempo metronome markings; the recordings will be analyzed in ascending order of running time, and for the purposes of this project, will be identified by the conductor's last name (Appendix 2).

ANALYSIS OF TEMPO METRONOME MARKINGS

The Saraste recording, with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, has a running time of 8:52 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 91 beats per minute. Tempo 2 increases the tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 54 beats per minute (eighth note equals 108 beats per minute), and increases again slightly at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute. Saraste's tempo 4 is almost precisely the same tempo as the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 44 beats per minute, just slightly slower than the same tempo of the beginning, which would be quarter note equals 45.5 beats per minute.

According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo as tempo 4; however, Saraste increases tempo slightly to quarter note equals 48 beats per minute. Saraste increases the tempo again for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 52 beats per minute when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases further still, this time in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking, to quarter note equals 66 beats per minute. Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo, however Saraste only decreases the tempo to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute before returning to his animated tempo of quarter note equals 66 beats per minute for tempo 9. Tempo 10 almost returns to the opening tempo with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 88 beats per minute, and tempo 11 keeps almost the

same tempo with eighth note equals 90 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 76 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Boulez recording, featuring the Cleveland Orchestra, has a running time of 8:55 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 104 beats per minute. Tempo 2 decreases the tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 50 beats per minute (eighth note equals 100 beats per minute) and increases slightly at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute. Boulez's tempo 4 is significantly slower than the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 38 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; however, Boulez increases the tempo to quarter note equals 54 beats per minute.

Boulez slightly increases tempo again for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 56 beats per minute when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases further still, this time in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking, to quarter note equals 68 beats per minute. Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo, however Boulez only decreases the tempo to quarter note equals 56 beats per minute before returning to a slightly slower animated tempo of quarter note equals 62 beats per minute for tempo 9. Tempo 10 is quite a bit slower than the opening tempo with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 84 beats per minute, and tempo 11 finally returns to the opening tempo with eighth note equals 104 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 80 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Abbado recording of the London Symphony Orchestra has a running time of 9:50 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire

orchestra solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 96 beats per minute. Tempo 2 increases the tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 52 beats per minute (eighth note equals 104 beats per minute) and increases again slightly at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute. Abbado's tempo 4 is slower than the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 30 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; however, Abbado increases the tempo slightly to quarter note equals 45 beats per minute. Debussy increases the tempo for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 52 beats per minute when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases further still, this time in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking, to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute.

Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo, however Abbado returns to his previous tempo of quarter note equals 52 beats per minute before returning to a slightly more animated tempo of quarter note equals 62 beats per minute for tempo 9. Tempo 10 should return to the opening tempo but is slightly slower with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 84 beats per minute, and tempo 11 drastically increases tempo to eighth note equals 104 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 48 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Previn recording, with the London Symphony Orchestra, has a running time of 10:19 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 92 beats per minute. Tempo 2 decreases the tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 40 beats per minute (eighth note equals 80 beats per minute) and increases at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 56 beats per minute. Previn's tempo 4 is markedly slower than the beginning with a

metronome marking of quarter note equals 34 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; however, Previn increases tempo slightly to quarter note equals 36 beats per minute.

Previn increases tempo again for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 45 beats per minute, almost exactly the original tempo when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases further still, this time in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking, to quarter note equals 60 beats per minute. Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo; however, Previn decreases the tempo to quarter note equals 48 beats per minute (slightly faster than the original tempo) before returning to a slightly slower animated tempo of quarter note equals 58 beats per minute for tempo 9. Tempo 10 should return to the opening tempo but is slower with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 82 beats per minute, and tempo 11 reduces tempo to eighth note equals 64 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 72 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Berlin Philharmonic recording led by Karajan has a running time of 10:20 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 91 beats per minute. Tempo 2 increases the tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 50 beats per minute (eighth note equals 100 beats per minute) and increases at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 52 beats per minute. Karajan's tempo 4 is slower than the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 38 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; Karajan nearly keeps the same tempo, just barely increasing tempo to quarter note equals 39 beats per minute. Karajan increases the tempo for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 48 beats per minute, just slightly faster than the original tempo when

Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 drastically increases, this time in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking, to quarter note equals 72 beats per minute.

Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo, however Karajan increases the tempo slightly to quarter note equals 50 beats per minute before returning to a slower animated tempo of quarter note equals 64 beats per minute for tempo 9. Tempo 10 should return to the opening tempo but is slower with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 72 beats per minute, and tempo 11 increases tempo to eighth note equals 84 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 70 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Frühbeck de Burgos recording, also with the London Symphony Orchestra, has a running time of 11:01 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra solidifying a much slower average metronome marking of eighth note equals 78 beats per minute. Tempo 2 almost keeps the same tempo, but decreases tempo slightly by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 38 beats per minute (eighth note equals 76 beats per minute), and increases at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 50 beats per minute. Frühbeck de Burgos' tempo 4 is only slightly faster than the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 40 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; Frühbeck de Burgos maintains the same tempo at quarter note equals 40 beats per minute.

Frühbeck de Burgos is consistent for tempo 6 at quarter note equals 40 beats per minute, exactly the original tempo when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases tempo in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking to quarter note equals 48 beats per minute. Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo, however

Frühbeck de Burgos slightly increases the tempo to quarter note equals 44 beats per minute (slightly faster than the original tempo) and maintains this tempo when Debussy calls for an animated tempo for tempo 9. Tempo 10 should return to the opening tempo but is slightly slower with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 72 beats per minute, and tempo 11 maintains tempo at eighth note equals 72 beats per minute. Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 68 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

The Tilson Thomas recording, again with the London Symphony Orchestra, has a running time of 11:01 minutes. The tempo of the opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the flutist, with the entire orchestra again solidifying an average metronome marking of eighth note equals 78 beats per minute. Tempo 2 increases tempo by averaging a metronome marking of quarter note equals 54 beats per minute (eighth note equals 108 beats per minute), and slightly increases at tempo 3 to quarter note equals 56 beats per minute. Tilson Thomas' tempo 4 is only slightly slower than the beginning with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 36 beats per minute. According to Debussy's tempo marking, tempo 5 should be the same tempo; however, Tilson Thomas increases tempo to quarter note equals 40 beats per minute. Tilson Thomas increases tempo again for tempo 6 to quarter note equals 50 beats per minute, faster than the original tempo when Debussy's tempo marking calls for the same tempo as the beginning. Tempo 7 increases tempo in accordance with Debussy's tempo marking to quarter note equals 72 beats per minute.

Tempo 8 should return to the opening tempo; however, Tilson Thomas increases the tempo to quarter note equals 50 beats per minute and increases the tempo to quarter note equals 66 beats per minute when Debussy calls for an animated tempo for tempo 9. Tempo 10 should return to the opening tempo but is slower with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 62

beats per minute, and tempo 11 increases tempo to eighth note equals 80 beats per minute.

Tempo 12 averages at eighth note equals 66 beats per minute as the piece continually slows down to the end.

INTERPRETATION OF TEMPO METRONOME MARKINGS

The Frühbeck de Burgos recording exhibits the closest tempo relationships as specified by Debussy's tempo markings. According to Debussy's tempo markings, tempi 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11 should all be the same tempo; Frühbeck de Burgos, for all intents and purposes, maintains the same metronome marking of quarter note equals 40 beats per minute, with the exceptions of tempo 1 being quarter note equals 39 beats per minute and tempi 10 and 11 being quarter note equals 36 beats per minute, differences in tempo that are almost indiscernible. Additionally, Debussy calls for tempo 3 to be faster than tempo 2, tempo 7 to be faster than tempo 6, tempo 9 to be faster than tempo 8, and tempo 12 to be the slowest tempo, all adhered to by Frühbeck de Burgos. The only tempo relationship Frühbeck de Burgos does not adhere to is the relationship between tempi 1 and 2; tempo 2 should be faster than tempo 1, but Frühbeck de Burgos decreases tempo by one beat per minute, or, essentially, maintains the same tempo. This could be justified because the exact relationship between tempi 1 and 2 is not specified, and tempo 2's marking of "animated" could suggest an atmosphere or style rather than a faster tempo.

Several commonalities occur across all seven recordings regarding tempo interpretations. The first, and most striking, commonality is tempo 4's metronome marking being the slowest in the entire piece. Tempo 4, according to Debussy's tempo marking, should be the same tempo as the beginning; however, with the exception of the Frühbeck de Burgos recording, each conductor decreases the tempo, and in some cases quite drastically. The Abbado recording has the largest decrease in tempo from tempo 1's metronome marking of eighth note equals 96 beats per minute

to tempo 4's metronome marking of quarter note equals 30 beats per minute (eighth note equals 60 beats per minute), a decrease in tempo by 37.5%. The second largest decrease in tempo between tempo 1 and tempo 4 is the Boulez recording, where tempo 1 is eighth note equals 104 beats per minute and tempo 4 is quarter note equals 38 beats per minute (eighth note equals 76 beats per minute), a decrease in tempo by 26.92%. The Previn recording is a close third in percent change from tempo 1 to tempo 4 with a decrease in tempo by 26.09%; the remaining four recordings do not have such drastic changes between tempo 1 and tempo 4 (Table 1).

Table 1: Percent Change from Tempo 1 to Tempo 4

Conductor	Tempo 1	Tempo 4	% Change*
Abbado	Eighth=96	Quarter=30	-37.5%
Boulez	Eighth=104	Quarter=38	-26.92%
Frühbeck de Burgos	Eighth=78	Quarter=40	+2.56%
Karajan	Eighth=91	Quarter=38	-16.48%
Previn	Eighth=92	Quarter=34	-26.09%
Saraste	Eighth=91	Quarter=44	-3.3%
Tilson Thomas	Eighth=78	Quarter=36	-7.69%

*Percent change is calculated with the following formula: $\frac{(T_2 - T_1)}{T_1} \times 100 = \% \text{ change}$

An additional commonality exists between all seven recordings in the transition between tempo 4 and tempo 5 (mm. 51-55). An important decision a conductor has to make on the interpretation of a piece is where unwritten tempo alterations will occur. In the case of all seven recordings of the *Prélude*, an unwritten *ritardando* is observed in measure 54 as a transition into tempo 5 at measure 55. The exact placement of the *ritardando* in measure 54 varies by

recording. The Boulez and Saraste recordings (the two shortest running times) both place the ritardando only on beat three to slightly stretch-out the melodic sixteenth notes in the second flute, first oboe, and first clarinet (Example 5). By comparison, the Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas recordings (who share the longest running time) observe the ritardando for the entirety of measure 54.

Example 5: Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, m. 54.

The image shows a musical score for measure 54 of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. It consists of four staves, each with a different woodwind instrument: Flute (FL.), Hautbois (HAUTB.), Cor Anglais (CÔR. ANGL.), and Clarinet (CL.). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The Flute part has a melodic line with sixteenth notes. The Hautbois part has a similar melodic line. The Cor Anglais part is mostly silent, with a few notes. The Clarinet part has a melodic line with sixteenth notes. The measure is marked with a '54' at the beginning.

The combination of all seven recordings decreasing tempo at tempo 4 (in relation to tempo 1) and observing an unwritten ritardando in measure 54 could be justified with two possible reasons why these four measures create a common interpretation among conductors. The first reason could be a relationship with the work's opening flute solo. Debussy marks tempo 4 to be the same tempo as the beginning. The opening flute solo is taken at the liberty of the performer and is slower than the tempo conductors will average at for tempo 1. While the clarinet's melodic content is unrelated to the flute solo, it is possible that conductors take a slower tempo at tempo 4 to recall back to the flute's improvisatory sounding solo.

The second reason tempo 4 may be slower than the beginning's average tempo, and the unwritten *ritardando* is observed in measure 54, could be to anticipate the importance of measure 55. Debussy's *Prélude* contains 110 measures of music, an exact correlation to Mallarmé's poem which contains 110 lines of poetry. Measure 55, like in the poem, is the exact halfway point of the music; measure 55 welcomes a new key change to D-flat major and introduces new melodic material. To make the transition into the halfway point truly symbolic, conductors draw out the preceding musical phrase before advancing to the music's second half.

The initial reason for this project stemmed from the vast differences in running lengths of the *Prélude*. Of the seven recordings analyzed, a fascinating relationship exists between three pairs of recordings: for all intents and purposes, the Boulez and Saraste recordings, Previn and Karajan recordings, and Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas recordings share the same running lengths. With pairs of recordings that share the same running lengths, similar tempi and tempi relationships would be expected. The following is an analysis of these pairs of recordings for their similarities and differences in tempi, and why unwritten tempo alterations may explain similar running lengths. For the purposes of these analyses, tempi within four metronome markings (plus or minus) will be considered the same tempo.

The Boulez and Saraste recordings share the shortest running lengths (8:55 minutes and 8:52 minutes, respectively). These recordings share more of the same tempo markings than the other two pairs of recordings; Boulez and Saraste share the same tempo markings for tempi 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12. The Boulez recording has the fastest tempo 1 metronome marking (eighth notes equals 104 beats per minute), while, surprisingly, Saraste shares the same tempo 1 metronome marking (eighth note equals 91 beats per minute) as the Karajan recording, which runs 1:28 minutes longer than Saraste. Boulez and Saraste's tempo 4 metronome markings are

quarter note equals 38 beats per minute and 44 beats per minute, respectively, just outside my threshold for the same tempo marking with a difference of six beats per minute. Similarly, Boulez and Saraste's tempo 5 metronome markings are quarter note equals 54 beats per minute and 48 beats per minute, respectively. Tempo 11 has the largest difference between Boulez and Saraste with metronome markings of eighth note equals 104 beats per minute and 90 beats per minute, respectively; this difference is compensated for by Boulez's final ritardando of the piece being slightly less drastic than Saraste's, which may account for Saraste's running length being only three seconds shorter than Boulez.

The Previn and Karajan recordings share running lengths, separated by one second, of 10:19 minutes and 10:20 minutes, respectively. These recordings have the second most shared tempo markings (seven, compared to Boulez and Saraste's eight), and share tempo markings for tempi 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 12. Tempo 1 for these recordings are shared with Sarste and Abbado, who both have shorter running lengths than Previn and Karajan. Previn and Karajan have the same metronome marking with Boulez for tempo 4; however, this similarity is short lived as Boulez drastically increases tempo from tempo 4 to tempo 5 while Previn and Karajan maintain the same tempo (per Debussy's tempo marking), one of the main reasons for Boulez's short running length. The metronome marking differences between Previn and Karajan show Karajan with faster metronome markings than Previn by a minimum of six beats per minute, with the exception of tempo 10 which has Previn faster than Karajan by ten beats per minute. While Karajan tends to take faster tempi than Previn, this difference is compensated for through Karajan's unwritten tempo alterations. Karajan slows down more than Previn in the pivotal m. 54 transition to tempo 5; additionally, Karajan slows down more than Previn in the transition into tempo 7, and takes a greater final ritardando to end the piece.

The Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas recordings share the same longest running length of 11:01 minutes yet have the fewest same metronome markings. Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas share only four tempo markings for tempi 1, 4, 5, and 12. Similarly to Previn and Karajan, Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas' metronome markings show Tilson Thomas with faster metronome markings by a minimum of six beats per minute, with the exception of tempo 10, which has Frühbeck de Burgos faster than Tilson Thomas by ten beats per minute. This similar relationship to Previn and Karajan could be explained by Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas sharing almost identical metronome markings for tempi 4, 5, and 12 as Previn and Karajan. The slower running lengths of Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas by about forty seconds is largely explained by the overall slower metronome markings taken by Frühbeck de Burgos and Tilson Thomas. Similar to Karajan, Tilson Thomas' faster tempo markings are compensated for by slower, more drastic unwritten tempo alterations, specifically at the transitions into tempi 5 and 7.

The Abbado recording, having no recording pair in terms of running length, shows many striking similarities in tempi to the Boulez recording, yet has a running length of almost a minute longer than Boulez. Abbado and Boulez share seven tempo markings (tempi 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11), and share four metronome markings of the exact same value (not within my acceptable range), which are more shared exact metronome markings than any other pairs of recordings analyzed. The two most significant factors in Abbado's recording being almost a minute longer than Boulez can be found in Abbado's tempi for tempo 1 and tempo 12. Abbado's tempo 1 metronome marking is eighth note equals 96 beats per minute, only eight beats per minute slower than Boulez; however, Abbado takes longer to establish his average tempo for tempo 1. Abbado establishes his average tempo around measure 17 while Boulez establishes his average tempo

around measure 4, almost immediately after the opening flute solo. Potentially even more significant is the difference in Abbado and Boulez's tempo 12 metronome markings; Abbado's metronome marking for the final five measures of the piece averages at eighth note equals 48 beats per minute, almost twice as slow as Boulez's eighth note equals 80 beats per minute. Additionally, Abbado's tempo 12 metronome marking, being the slowest of all recordings analyzed, is eighteen beats per minute slower than the next slowest tempo 12 metronome marking of eighth note equals 66 beats per minute (Tilson Thomas). Even with the numerous similarities to Boulez, and a drastically slower tempo 12, Abbado's recording is only slightly faster than the average running time of all seven records of 10:03 minutes.

Of the numerous recordings and interpretations that exist of the *Prélude*, conductors tend to follow a similar pattern of tempo relationships and unwritten tempo alterations. The fact that several recordings analyzed share the same metronome markings for a majority of the piece suggests a loose standardization of performance practice, even if performance length can still vary drastically from conductor to conductor. Debussy's vague tempo markings offer the conductor little assistance; however, the well-educated conductor would certainly be familiar with Mallarmé's poem and its unusual poetic structure, allowing the conductor to make an informed interpretation of tempo that reflects Mallarmé's poetic language.

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APPENDIX 1

Debussy's Tempo Markings

Tempo #	Tempo Marking (French)	Tempo Marking (English)
1	Très modéré	Very moderate
2	En animant	With animation
3	Toujour en animant	Always with animation
4	1 st movt	Tempo 1
5	Même movt et très soutenu	The same tempo and very supported
6	Movt du Début	Tempo of the beginning
7	Un peu plus animé	A little more animated
8	1 st movt	Tempo 1
9	Dans le movt plus animé	With more animated motion
10	Dans le 1 st movt avec plus de langueur	Tempo I with more languor
11	a tempo	a tempo
12	Très lent et très retenu jusqu'à la fin	Very slow and very ritardando until the end

APPENDIX 2

Recorded Tempo Metronome Markings of Analyzed Recordings

Tempo #	Abbado	Boulez	Frühbeck de Burgos	Karajan	Previn	Saraste	Tilson Thomas
1	Eighth=96	Eighth=104	Eighth=78	Eighth=91	Eighth=92	Eighth=91	Eighth=78
2	Quarter=52	Quarter=50	Quarter=38	Quarter=50	Quarter=40	Quarter=54	Quarter=54
3	Quarter=60	Quarter=60	Quarter=50	Quarter=52	Quarter=56	Quarter=60	Quarter=56
4	Quarter=30	Quarter=38	Quarter=40	Quarter=38	Quarter=34	Quarter=44	Quarter=36
5	Quarter=45	Quarter=54	Quarter=40	Quarter=39	Quarter=36	Quarter=48	Quarter=40
6	Quarter=52	Quarter=56	Quarter=40	Quarter=48	Quarter=45	Quarter=52	Quarter=50
7	Quarter=60	Quarter=68	Quarter=48	Quarter=72	Quarter=60	Quarter=66	Quarter=72
8	Quarter=52	Quarter=56	Quarter=44	Quarter=50	Quarter=48	Quarter=60	Quarter=50
9	Quarter=62	Quarter=62	Quarter=44	Quarter=64	Quarter=58	Quarter=66	Quarter=66
10	Eighth=84	Eighth=84	Eighth=72	Eighth=72	Eighth=82	Eighth=88	Eighth=62
11	Eighth=104	Eighth=104	Eighth=72	Eighth=84	Eighth=64	Eighth=90	Eighth=80
12	Eighth=48	Eighth=80	Eighth=68	Eighth=70	Eighth=72	Eighth=76	Eighth=66

**Running
Length
(minutes)**

9:50

8:55

11:01

10:20

10:19

8:52

11:01